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ABSTRACT

In 1979, the Indian Institute of Education launched the country's first comprehensive project in part-time, non-formal primary education. Now in its third phase, PROPEL (Promoting Primary and Elementary Education Project) is training the inhabitants of 137 villages to take responsibility for the quality of education in the non-formal stream. This booklet describes the PROPEL project, illustrating how a decentralized model of primary education can succeed. The introductory chapter describes the development of the project as a holistic model of rural development embracing early childhood care, women's groups, adult literacy, post-literacy learning, and teacher training. The first chapter discusses India's educational challenge and the barriers to universal primary education among children from disadvantaged groups. Various features related to the project are discussed in the remaining chapters. They are as follows: (1) the action-research approach; (2) understanding the needs of the local community; (3) formation of non-formal education centers; (4) developing learning and teaching strategies in the classrooms; (5) developing a locally relevant curriculum; (6) compiling class materials with a rural orientation; (7) recruiting teachers from the villages; (8) evaluating progress; and (9) sources of funding. In addition, the booklet documents PROPEL's use of support programs such as women's development groups and village education committees to mobilize the community in favor of schooling; its success in influencing the formal primary education system; and its efforts to fight the two obstacles of poverty and early marriage. The booklet concludes by noting that the project's strength lies in reaching children, especially girls, and in training people at the grassroots level to take responsibility for education. Demographic details about India and the PROPEL project are included. (BAC)

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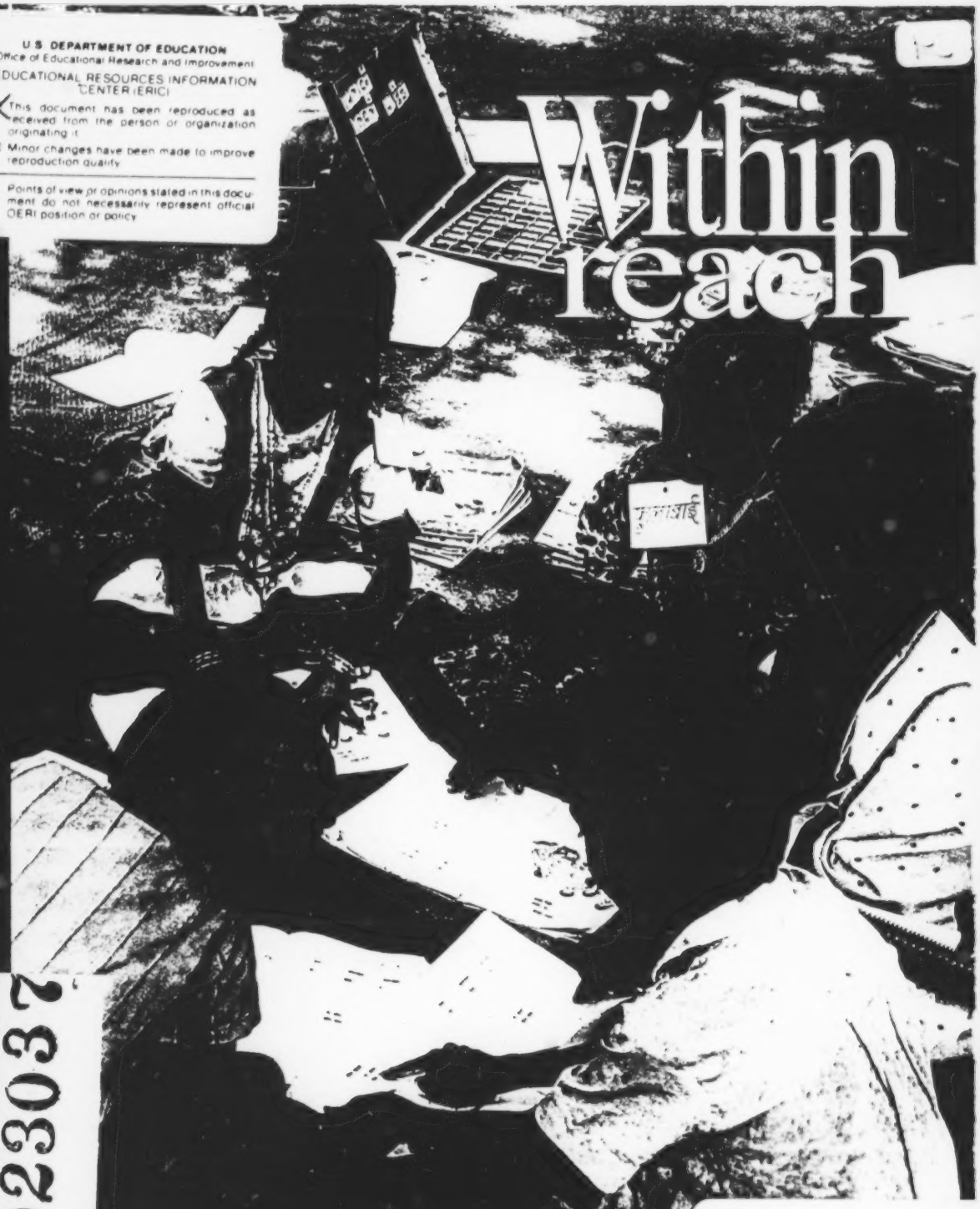
# Within reach

*The story of PROPEL, a non-formal education project for rural children in India*



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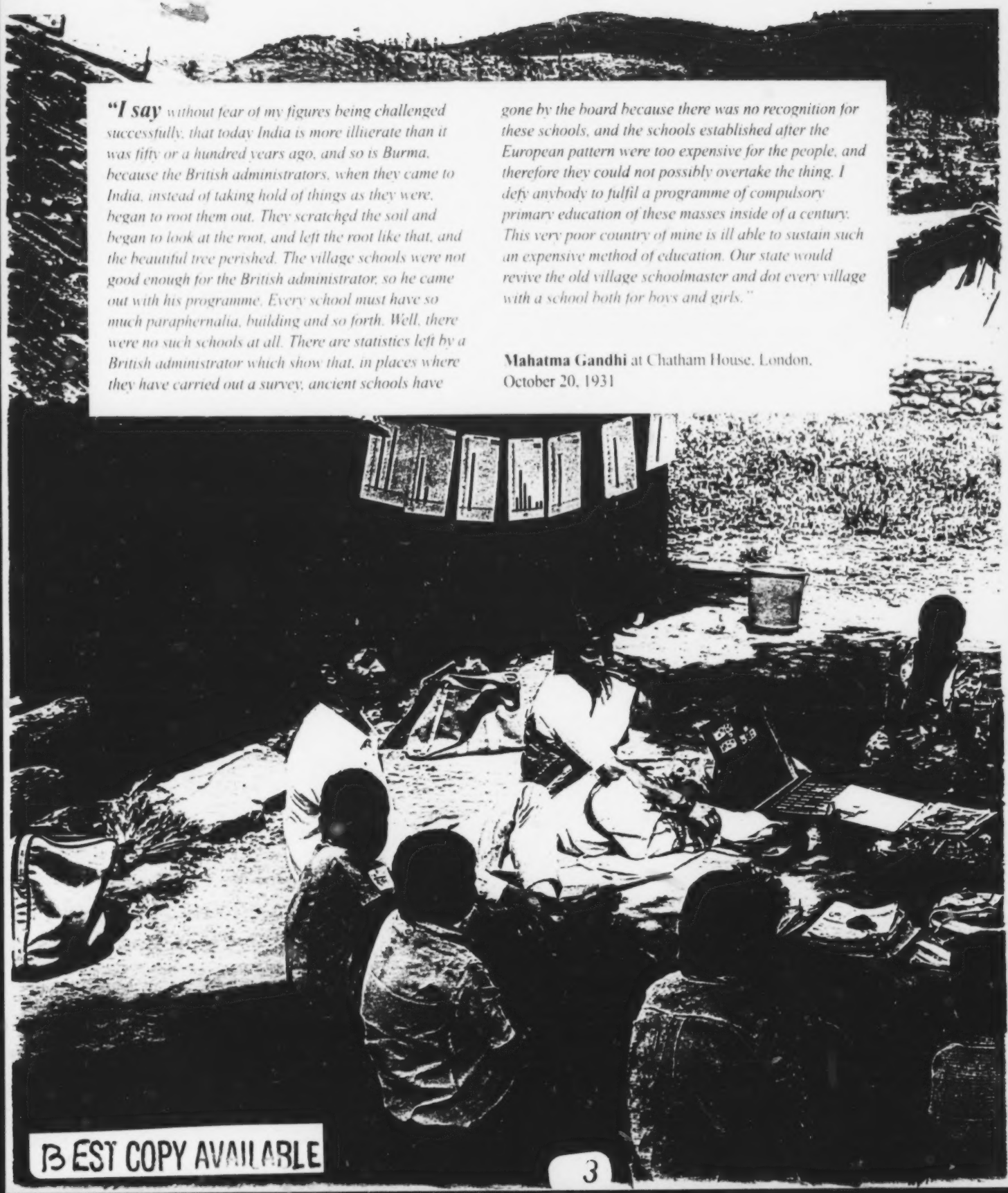

*"I say without fear of my figures being challenged successfully, that today India is more illiterate than it was fifty or a hundred years ago, and so is Burma, because the British administrators, when they came to India, instead of taking hold of things as they were, began to root them out. They scratched the soil and began to look at the root, and left the root like that, and the beautiful tree perished. The village schools were not good enough for the British administrator, so he came out with his programme. Every school must have so much paraphernalia, building and so forth. Well, there were no such schools at all. There are statistics left by a British administrator which show that, in places where they have carried out a survey, ancient schools have gone by the board because there was no recognition for these schools, and the schools established after the European pattern were too expensive for the people, and therefore they could not possibly overtake the thing. I defy anybody to fulfil a programme of compulsory primary education of these masses inside of a century. This very poor country of mine is ill able to sustain such an expensive method of education. Our state would revive the old village schoolmaster and dot every village with a school both for boys and girls."*

**Mahatma Gandhi** at Chatham House, London, October 20, 1931

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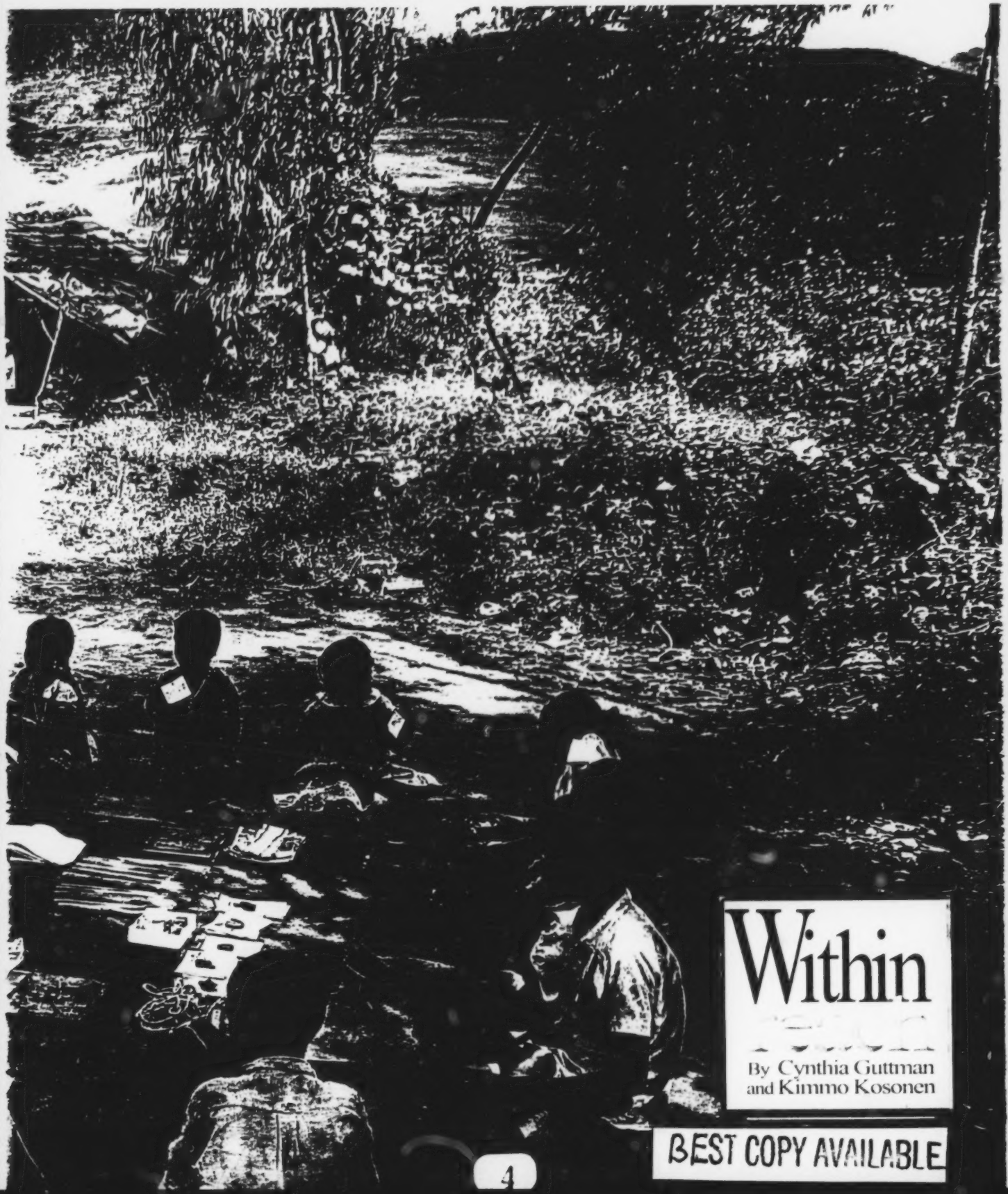

# Within

By Cynthia Guttman
and Kimmo Kosonen

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*"Mahatma Gandhi had emphasized the need to work outside the educational system even with the ultimate objective of reforming the system itself. The programmes of non-formal education provide a good basis for these efforts. To the extent these outside efforts grow and succeed, the conditions within the system will also begin to change and it is the simultaneous action both within and without the system that will help us bring about the essential educational transformation and provide good education to all the people."*

***J.P. Naik,*** *founder of the Indian Institute of Education, in "Education for Our People" (1978).*

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# Introduction

*This project has been particularly effective in reaching girls, the largest group excluded from schooling by household tasks and deep-rooted social customs.*

avita, Mangal, Sunita, and Kamala are girls between the ages of nine and fourteen from the Indian state of Maharashtra. During the day, they contribute to their family's income by grazing cattle and helping in the house, just like some 15 million Indian children under 14 who have never attended school or were forced to drop out at an early age.

But a new window on living and learning has opened since they started attending night classes in their village as part of a project designed by the Indian Institute of Education (IIE, see page 29). Sitting in a circle, the girls talk about the day's happenings and join in reading, writing and telling stories, singing songs and playing games.

Indian leaders have called for universal primary education in India since the mid-19th century. While the Imperial Government asked a commission to recommend an educational system suited to colonial rule, educated Indians set up primary schools on a voluntary basis, especially for girls, in the towns. The first one that admitted girls as well as women was opened in Pune City in 1848, enabling several widows and destitute women to complete primary education and become teachers.

Pune, in Maharashtra state, has kept up this tradition of social reform. Today, it is home to the Indian Institute of Education, which in 1979 launched the country's first comprehensive action-research project in part-time, non-formal primary education. In its first and second phases (1979-1985 and 1985-1988), it worked respectively with 110 and 35 villages. Now in its third phase, PROPEL (Promoting Primary and

Elementary Education Project) is training the inhabitants of 137 villages to take responsibility for the quality of education in the non-formal stream.

The rural community is PROPEL's backbone: from analysing a village's educational profile and deciding to start a non-formal education course, to choosing instructors and solving problems in running the project, the community -including local leaders, women and primary school teachers- is at the heart of the IIE model. Flexible timetables, curricula tailored to the local environment, instructors familiar with the community and easy access to classes are highlights of a project which has been particularly effective in reaching girls, the largest group excluded from

schooling by household tasks and deep-rooted social customs. By running two-hour classes for some 300 evenings a year, the programme hopes to raise all children to the level of formal school grade 3 or 4 within two years.

Supported by the state and central governments, the project applies "micro-planning", a key element of the 1992 National Policy on Education (NPE) in which the district, not the state, is the unit of decentralized planning. It is also in line with the government's view that alternative channels of primary education are essential if Education for All is to be achieved.

Through its "action-research" approach to development, the IIE has fine-tuned the PROPEL programme in several phases over the past 15 years to make it into a holistic model of rural development embracing early childhood care, women's groups, adult literacy, post-literacy learning and training villagers to manage local education. The PROPEL story provides valuable clues as to how a comprehensive community-based and decentralized model of primary education can succeed. PROPEL has also started to influence the formal system: besides giving teachers a chance to help shape the non-formal education (NFE) programme, it has recently started to share its pedagogical approach with formal schools as teachers have enquired about IIE-produced materials.

*Obstacles to learning: (left page) fetching water is one of the most common household chores preventing children, especially girls, from attending primary school. Rural poverty has often stood in the way of universalizing primary education.*



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# India's educational challenge

While India's elementary education system has expanded into one of the largest in the world, the country is also home to the world's highest number of out-of-school children (22 per cent of the 160 million children in the 6-14 age group) and adult illiterates (30 per cent of the total population). If Education for All is to be achieved in India, then about 19 to 24 million children in the 6-14 age group, of whom 60 per cent are girls, must be reached by the end of the decade.

***Over the past four decades, rural poverty, caste and gender discrimination, along with the nature of the rural economy, have stood in the way of universal primary education, especially among children from disadvantaged groups.***

A commitment to education is enshrined in India's 1950 Constitution which says "the State shall endeavour to provide, within a period of ten years from the commencement of this Constitution, for free and compulsory education for all children until they complete the age of fourteen years." Basic education was one of the goals of India's freedom movement. "We felt at that time that total freedom would never be ours if we were not educated and if we did not do our best to educate," said Dr Chitra Naik in a recent interview with "The Times of India." Aware that the British system was unsuitable for most rural Indians, Mahatma Gandhi devised a work-centred primary education scheme to increase rural productivity and involve the rural community in educating its children. Educational administrators and political leaders opposed it saying it would differentiate between urban and rural learners, and deprive rural children of the opportunity to obtain government jobs.

At independence in 1947, only 14 per cent of the population was literate and one child out of three was enrolled in primary school. Over the past four decades, rural poverty, caste and gender discrimination, along with the nature of the rural economy, have stood in the way of universal primary education, especially among children from disadvantaged groups. Recognizing that the conventional education system could not attract these groups and required comprehensive reorganization, the government appointed the Indian Education Commission in 1964 to study the issue. Its members underlined the importance of flexibility and relevance in the educational system, and of community participation for spreading and organizing primary education in particular.

Acting on these findings and with supporting advice from the Planning Commission, the Ministry of Education introduced a part-time, non-formal primary education scheme by giving special help to states with the most out-of-school children. This new measure "did not quite succeed in evolving a credible system which could attract the out-of-school children

*Students in the project area work by day and attend classes in the evening (far left). On every village selected by the project, a survey is done to assess how many people might need the programme. The PROPEL project targets rural communities in Pune district, Maharashtra.*

because hardly any special preparation was made for launching, conducting, monitoring and evaluating this crucial innovation," writes Dr Naik, honorary director of the PROPEL project. "Non-formal primary education for socio-economically deprived working children called for non-traditional approaches to its organisation and pedagogy."

In 1985, the country's educational system was reviewed, leading to the National Policy on Education (NPE/1986), updated in 1992. It shifted the emphasis from simple enrolment to enrolment as well as retention, quality and achievement, since as the action programme pointed out, "enrolment by itself is of little importance if children do not continue beyond one year, many of them not seeing the school for more than a few days."

The NPE emphasized local planning, mobilizing community support, a child-centred and activity-based learning process, the consideration of gender in all planning and closer links with NGOs and basic community services such as primary health care. The NPE also called for a large and systematic programme of non-formal education to achieve universal elementary education. It stressed that this alternative channel should adopt the standards of the formal system but be flexible enough for learners to progress at their own pace.

Since 1986, the number of NFE centres in the country has risen from 126,000 to 238,000, with those for girls up from 20,500 to 79,0000. In the same period, enrolment in these centres rose from 4 to 6 million. Over 400 voluntary agencies are participating in the NFE programme.



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# The PROPEL model: an action-research approach

*"It is a research project, we have to look for the reasons for both its failures and its successes".*

All IIE research and programmes are based on the idea that education and development are closely related, and that people at local level are the makers of development, while government agencies are facilitators. From this standpoint, the PROPEL project assumes that Education for All can best be organised through community mobilization.

Today, the IIE is headed by Dr Chitra Naik, an educationist and member of India's prestigious Planning Commission. As a young woman, Dr Naik leaned towards journalism and poetry-writing, but after meeting her husband, the eminent educationist J.P. Naik, she turned to education, especially in the countryside. A Fulbright fellow in 1953-54, Dr Naik completed her post-doctoral studies at the Teacher's College of Columbia University, N.Y. She spent several years living in an Indian village to work in an integrated health and education programme. Dr Naik's contribution to this field was recognized during the Education for All Summit, in New Delhi in December 1993, when she received UNESCO's Jan Amos Comenius award for innovation in educational research.

By 1986, the Indian Institute of Education had developed a workable model of non-formal education, known as the "IIE Model" by the Indian Ministry of Human Resource Development. The project takes account of the economic, social and cultural plight of poor children and aims to mobilize rural communities for educational development. This begins with a meticulous survey of local educational needs, conducted as a participatory exercise.

PROPEL has evolved in three phases throughout which the "action-research" approach has been applied, giving it the profile of an experiment that has to be carefully prepared, implemented, observed and monitored in order to be improved along the way. Theoretical knowledge of education and rural society is combined with the practical experience of participants, through systematic steps of problem-investigation. "Because PROPEL is a research project, we have to look for the reasons for both its failures and its successes," says a PROPEL staff member.

During Phase I of the project, from 1979-85, nearly 4,500 children from 110 villages in five types of agro-climatic areas were reached under a non-formal education programme involving local leadership and communities. A


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*Reaching all ages: young children attending a pre-school in their village (far left). Knowing the community's needs: charts illustrate a village's educational profile.*

1985 evaluation by the University of Bombay praised the project for its relevant curriculum, attractive and flexible teaching-learning materials, good training for locally-selected 'non-professional' teachers and community-based management and supervision. It showed a higher benefit at lower costs than those incurred in full-time formal schools.

Phase II (1985-1988) covered 669 children in NFE centres of 35 newly-selected villages in very poor drought-prone and difficult hilly tracts. The emphasis in this phase was on testing measures for community involvement by strengthening Village Education Committees as local motivators and managers of primary education. PROPEL is now in its third phase, putting the accent on comprehensive community education, both formal and non-formal, involving large-scale collaboration for social change. The project is expected to produce a replicable planning and development model so that a training programme in community-level planning for education can be set up for voluntary agencies and government officials. So far, this phase has brought more than 5,500 out-of-school children into the primary education stream through 178 NFE centres, learning camps and voluntary visitor-instructors for the unreached small groups of school-age children through formal and non-formal arrangements systematically planned and monitored by Village Education Committees. In 1994, these villages will work towards the universalization of upper primary education.



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# Starting off:
# what are the local needs?

The community -village leaders, teachers from the formal school and parents- is at the centre of the project. Unless the community stands behind an NFE programme and encourages children to learn, the project cannot take off. "The initiative for starting the programme has to come from the villagers. They themselves have to survey how many people need the programme," says an education coordinator. "A place for the centre has to be offered and the villagers themselves have to solve the problems." The first step in the project is to convene a village meeting to tell communities about the NFE programme and its reliance on local participation.

Field staff from the IIE train the semi-educated youth to prepare maps, information sheets and conduct house-to-house surveys. In this way, every household gets to know about the programme, while the project staff finds out about the economic and educational situation of every villager. By involving the community in identifying educational needs, the chances of holding classes and ways to reach the marginalized, a movement for education is started. "I think it's very essential to go to the people and to work with the people," says Dr. Naik. "For cooperation, we think it's very essential to establish a rapport with all the functionaries working in the villages, be they governmental, non-governmental or local."

Once the surveys have been analyzed, the community decides if it needs and wants to start non-formal primary education classes or other community-development programmes. If so, it must find a place for an NFE centre and arrange for lighting if classes are held at night. A special committee, known as the Village Education Committee (VEC), is appointed to help project staff organise and supervise classes and to rally the rural community to the educational cause. This committee draws up lists of possible volunteer-teachers and helps choose them.

The VECs are the chief means of participation in the PROPEL project. Although the concept of VECs has been around for many years, it was the 1992 Programme of Action, coupled with legislation making it mandatory for all states to set up democratically elected bodies for local self-government, which gave VECs legal sanction and political and administrative support. The VECs are established by consensus at a meeting of the village council and are important in convincing parents to enrol their children in a non-formal centre, in planning and supervising classes, and trying to solve problems.

# The centres:
# a place called Apla Vargh

*The village sees the education centre as something it owns.*

Every evening, Sunanda, a 19-year-old woman from Chivhewadi, a village of 800 inhabitants, transforms the courtyard of her uncle's home into a classroom, putting charts up on the mud wall and displaying small clay objects made by the children on the ground. During the monsoon season or on cold evenings, the class moves indoors.

Because Chivhewadi is in hilly country, Sunanda often picks up students and accompanies them to class. Most are girls who do farm and household work during the day. According to a local primary school teacher, "all the village children are enrolled in the primary school. What happens is that during the third standard, the girls have become old enough to work and then they drop out." Their brothers usually go on attending the formal school.

Since most dropouts from the formal school are girls, the centres have to be as close to their homes as possible. Parents are unwilling to send their daughters any distance at such late hours. Centres can be set up in school rooms, private houses, temples, village council offices, cow sheds and other places. In several tribal hamlets, the community built special sheds with bamboo matting, mud bricks and other local materials.

Whatever the NFE centre is, the village sees it as something it owns. Enrolment is not easy at first: prospective learners who have already passed normal school-entrance age and may have had disappointing experiences before dropping out of formal school are not likely to

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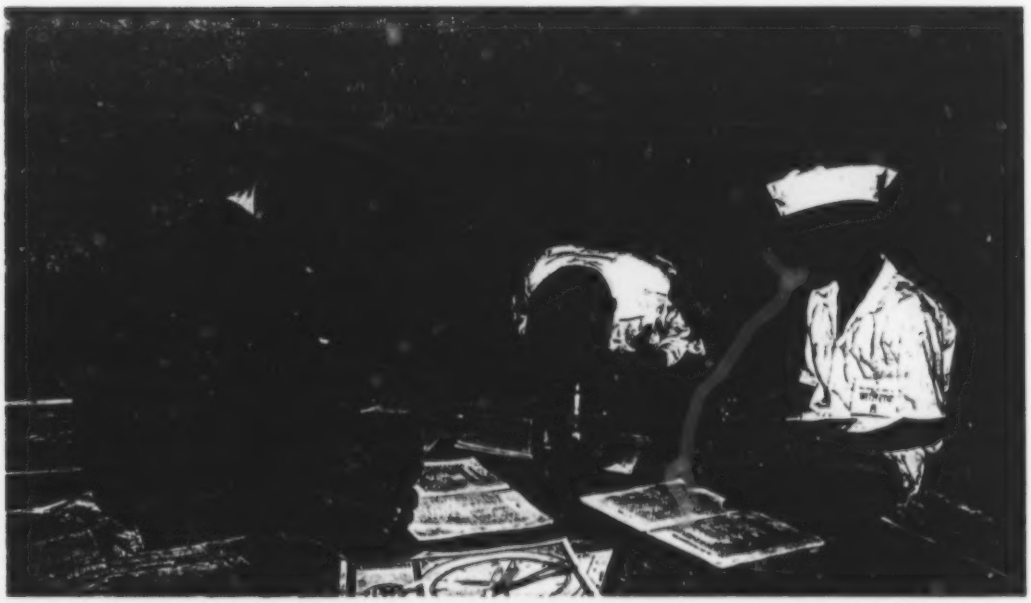

be too enthusiastic about starting to learn again. So PROPEL works with the VEC to create a community atmosphere to encourage universal primary education.

NFE centres are inaugurated ceremonially by an important person or official and can be visited any time by the community. On inauguration day, the chosen instructor is presented with a set of equipment for the class. Prospective students receive a name-badge and the instructor makes a brief speech assuring villagers that he/she is committed to helping the children learn successfully and will treat them carefully as younger brothers and sisters. The guest of honour presents slates and textbooks to the students, explaining that they belong to the NFE centre.

The project is community-oriented with an informal atmosphere, but this does not mean it lacks structure. A sense of responsibility and belonging is fostered among students. A cardboard sign reading Apla Vargh ("Our Class") and the name of the village is hung by the teacher wherever the class is held. No school bell is rung, but the children are expected to collect one another and come to class on time. In places where girls are afraid to venture out in the evening, they are collected and walked home by the teacher or another villager.

Since materials and books belong to the class, students know they must be handled carefully. Weekly schedules, dates of holidays and special activities are decided between the students and their teacher. In western Maharashtra, for example, vacations are usually determined by the rainy season or the harvesting period.

Taking part in these decisions raises children's self-esteem and capacity to enjoy learning. The "class-room" becomes a congenial place where children get greater encouragement than in the more disciplined and rigid formal school. Students call their teachers "Tai" and "Bhau", meaning elder sister or brother, and sit in a circle for classes. This interaction of students and teacher helps create a relaxed atmosphere, ideal for dramatics, story-telling, singing, discussions and performing science experiments.



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## The classes:

# making learning a joy

Understanding the lives of the children attending NFE classes has been the basis for developing suitable curriculum and learning and teaching strategies. In a non-formal learning atmosphere where attendance is voluntary, children must look forward to coming to class, especially after a day's work.

All come from poor backgrounds, most are past the age of entry into the formal system and their parents are usually illiterate. A growing number come from single-parent homes and most are girls who need help to overcome inferiority feelings "deeply injected into their psyche by convention-bound parents and society," says Dr. Naik. "It was necessary to create opportunities for them to express themselves freely in speech, drawing, singing and dramatization. The class-climate which gave them respect and freedom, yogasanas, songs, stories and various opportunities for self-expression were the main techniques which enabled the pupils to tackle academic learning and make progress in overall self-development."

In an average NFE class, there are about 20 students between the age of 9 and 14. Before starting class, children freshen up with a bucket of water provided by the project. A typical class begins with a "prayer-song", followed by simple yogasanas for relaxation or more singing with tapping on sticks to keep rhythm. Students report on the day's happenings by asking each other questions, then settle down to their activities. The class is usually divided into several groups: in one, students might start to write multiplication tables on the slates. In another, they copy some sentences from their primer onto their slates and eventually read small stories. In a third one, the instructor may help students learn new syllables and make words out of them on the flannel-graph.

These small groups where students take turns being tutors and tutees, foster a cooperative learning environment and favour self-discipline. "This peer-group learning is the best way to teach an ungraded class in which some students are advanced, some are average and others below average," says an education coordinator. At the end of the class, students gather in a circle again to listen to a story read by the teacher, after which they are expected to answer questions. The class usually ends with games and singing.

Dividing the class into groups and emphasizing "mastery learning", which encourages students to compete with themselves rather than others, are key aspects of PROPEL's teaching strategy. "A tradition is developed that is taken into the home," said one instructor. "Students learn how to help each other and ask for help. We also teach them to manage education: how to study, how to read, so they can continue their education at home." The goal is to help them be independent learners by the end of the two-year course, skilled enough to help the family manage accounts, write letters and applications when necessary, read newspapers, stories, circulars etc. "I can read and write now," says Indubai, a 14-year-old girl who did the NFE course. "I can speak confidently with a new person, keep account of my daily wages and, if time allows, I teach my brother. I also learnt how to keep myself clean and live neatly."

# A curriculum to suit local needs

*The children's lives and environment are treated as learning resources.*

According to Dr Naik, centralized production of school materials is one of the biggest problems plaguing the Indian education system. It is why the IIE, in its small way, has concentrated on developing a locally-relevant curriculum in the most common language of the region, Marathi. Designing it began with systematic analysis of the formal school's primary curriculum to ensure the part-time classes covered the basic units of learning. A non-formal curriculum tends to stress preparing children for their youth and adulthood in the community, and is not necessarily geared towards entering secondary school.

The children's lives and environment are treated as learning resources enabling them to master language, mathematics, social studies, and personal and social development concepts. Oral instruction is emphasised at the beginning of the course and reduced as students learn to read and grasp new materials.

"We give knowledge which is essential for life," says one education coordinator, who thinks that school textbooks restrict the child's learning to the three 'Rs' and routine preparation for secondary school. In PROPEL's programme, students interview parents and older relatives to find out the history of their own families. The class explores landmarks, institutions, occupations and traditions in their village. Each class prepares a booklet showing local crops, flora, fauna, communications, rivers and streams. Seasonal festivals are celebrated and studied in the light of their geographical meaning and importance. Students do not officially have homework but are encouraged to develop greater awareness of their environment: during the day, working in the fields, they often collect stones, feathers, seeds, berries, leaves, bark or insects and describe their findings in class. These descriptions can lead to exercises in language and numeracy, history, geography and science.

Parents are the first to see their children's new awareness and self-confidence. "I am very grateful to the people who provided the NFE centre," said the mother of 12-year-old Mangal. "She was very shy and introverted before. Since she has been at the NFE centre, she has become talkative." Another mother reported that her daughter Kavita has pleaded not to be married before 18, echoing issues raised by the NFE instructor and discussed in class. Kavita's mother also recounted an incident which shows how children put their learning to use: "When I was ill and had fever, Kavita insisted that I should drink boiled water. We don't usually do that, because it has a different taste."



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## Class materials:

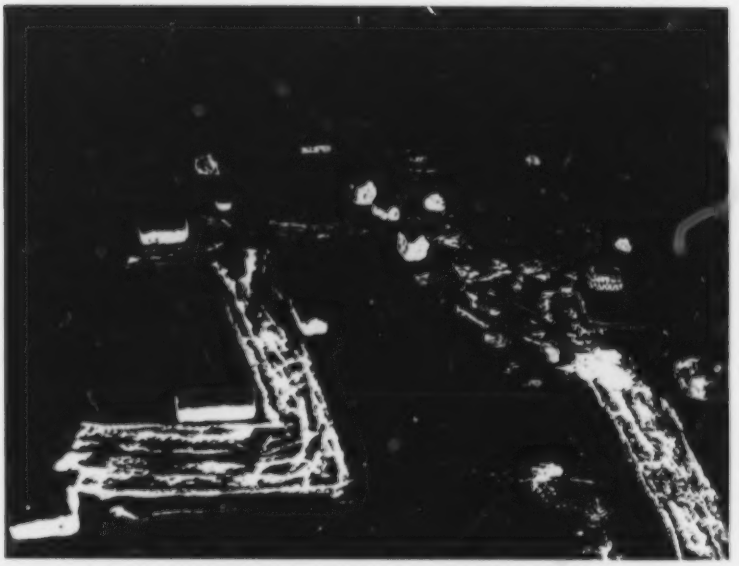
# a true rural orientation

The primers and readers were compiled by the project team after discussions with community leaders to ensure they had a genuine rural orientation in content and language. Linguists, educators, sociologists and psychologists were consulted for the language lessons. The language and vocabulary of science and mathematics material were also checked with community members to ensure their links with oral traditions. This process calls for flexibility and the openness to recognize shortcomings: one of the programme's first textbooks posed "problems with the dialects and was not region-specific, so children in the hills could not understand many of the ideas," explains a PROPEL staff member. Today, PROPEL's NFE curriculum covers the following subjects:

**Language:** The two language primers, which aim to stimulate dialogue, cover the whole alphabet and stress listening, speaking, reading and writing.

**Mathematics:** Students cut geometrical shapes out of paper, draw pictures, do oral accounts, learn measures of length, breadth, area, capacity and weight by actual practice.

**Social studies:** The history of the village and the arrival of technology (bicycles, pumps, electric lights, radio, etc.) is traced. The idea that 'history is society's past' is understood and grasped by interviewing old people. A time-line of important events is drawn by students and teachers. In geography, the local environment is studied and everyone helps to draw a village map. Environmental factors are monitored and entered in a notebook called "Our Village." Each centre/class prepares a statement on the development needs of the village.



*Building a model of their village helps students understand their surroundings (above). Posters on essential issues are used in adult education and discussion groups. The one the left illustrate how germs are spread and ways of preventing it.*

**Health:** Yoga exercises, discussions around health and hygiene charts, use of folders on water, nutrition, food, first aid and common ailments, all promote awareness of health. Medication for minor bruises, scabies and lice is given when needed.

**Science:** Students observe natural phenomena, learn to do experiments and relate this knowledge to daily experiences. A special science kit for experiments is given to each centre, with a guide for use.

**Creativity and aesthetic sensitivity** are promoted through art work, decoration with leaves and flowers, singing, playing, dance and drama.

The project also supplies each centre with a small blackboard, a flannel-graph, cut-out shapes of numbers and letters, a mirror and combs, a teacher's register, notebook and remarks-book, paper, crayons, scissors and a first-aid kit.

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# Teachers: from the village

*"By teaching children, I increase my own knowledge. I get to grow with these girls."*

While the old British colonial policy of not appointing local people as teachers for fear of sedition and rebellion still persists in the formal school system, PROPEL favours hiring of local teachers, especially women. The Village Education Committees are responsible for choosing them.

Training rural teachers for non-formal, part-time classes has no precedent in India. Most PROPEL teachers are women with very little education. Training is done within walking distance of the instructor's village and emphasizes personality development: "The programme is totally participatory," says a PROPEL staff member. "We focus on awareness, skills-training and attitude formation." The first training session takes 10 days. Each evening, trainees watch a non-formal centre in action. The Institute believes such training is a very good way of keeping instructors interested throughout the course. Then, training sessions of three to four days are held about once every six weeks. Informality is the rule: "We all sit in a circle on the floor, like in class, so we are on an equal level with the teachers," says a staff member. Once a year, the Indian Institute of Education organises a meeting of all PROPEL's instructors for an exchange of experience among them.

Regularly boosting a teacher's motivation is one way to fight a relatively high turnover among instructors. NFE instructors only work a few hours a day and get an honorarium of about 105 rupees, about one-twenty-fifth of a primary school teacher's pay. Migration to cities is a common reason why instructors quit their jobs. Female instructors sometimes resign after marrying or having children, but the project staff have found that married women who are permanently settled in the village are the most reliable teachers. PROPEL also tries to minimize the impact of teacher drop-out by recruiting and training several additional instructors from the same village.

Sometimes PROPEL has been a stepping stone for instructors to move on to better-paid jobs. Some women view it as a chance to take part in local development: "I get a lot of joy from teaching though I can earn more money in other ways, like sewing," said one. "But I feel that by teaching children, I increase my own knowledge. I get to grow with these girls."

Teachers receive support and guidance from Education coordinators, who also must come from the area where they work. Education coordinators are chosen by the IIE, in consultation with local officials and well-educated non-officials. They are usually unemployed graduates and matriculates who understand rural education and development problems. To date, all are men, due to the very limited number of female degree-holders in rural areas. Responsible for centres in six to eight villages, their main job is to help instructors apply NFE teaching methods and feel accountable to the community rather than to a distant employer like the district administration. They organise recurrent training for instructors, keep daily diaries and prepare monthly reports to discuss with the project team. "The education coordinator frequently visits NFE classes and has contacts

*Many women see NFE classes as a chance to take part in local development.*

with the villagers, the leaders and the formal school teachers. This is how we get support from them," says a planning facilitator, who is a link between the IIE and the education coordinator. "Whenever the education coordinator goes to a class, he discusses things with the teacher and makes suggestions. The next time, he will watch whether the teacher is applying what was discussed."

A project team at the Institute does planning and keeps in contact with the field staff. Headed by a director, the team comprises four experts - one each for curriculum, materials, teacher training and evaluation- and 20 field staff (three planning facilitators and 17 education coordinators). The IIE staff have extensive training and research experience in rural education. Their job is to supervise and guide the field staff, supply equipment not available locally, prepare funding and budget proposals, including salaries, make progress reports and write about the project's implementation. The salaries of PROPEL's field staff, including NFE instructors and education coordinators, are paid into their accounts in rural banks located in the project area.

# Stress-free evaluations

There are no exams in the NFE programme because uniform tests go against the principle of learning at one's own pace. Instead, apart from regular self-evaluation done by students with the help of simple testing materials, a children's fair is held every five-and-a-half months. Attended by students and instructors from several NFE centres in the same area, the fair is often the first chance girls have had to go outside their village and take part in a celebration for their age-group. The host-village helps organise the fair and provides a hot lunch, drinking water and toilets. The children start by showing off their skills in story-telling, singing and drawing, games and sports, often rehearsed for several weeks. In the afternoon, after some rest, groups of children do tests marked by an external teacher on a detailed evaluation sheet. The sheets are used by both students and teachers and give each student a different goal to reach by the end of the next semester. Rather than a device to pass or fail students, the tests are seen as a means for them to assess their own progress and set goals for the next stage of learning. This way, the community also rallies around education: the fair lasts a day and the children take obvious pride and delight in sharing their achievements with an audience come from several villages to watch them.

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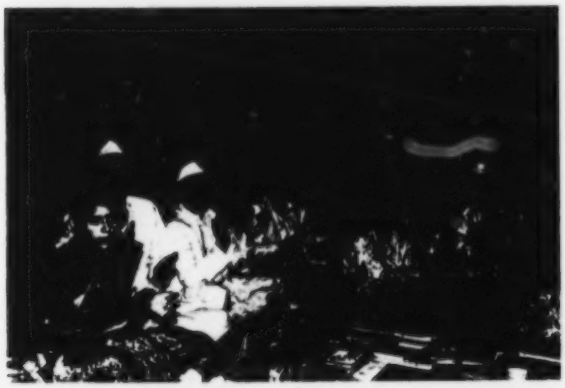
# Reaching out to all ages

Although primary education is the core of PROPEL, putting education within reach of all other groups in the community has turned it into a broad rural development programme. All the following "support programmes" help mobilize the community in favour of schooling and in creating "a culture of education."

***Child Recreation Centres** (CRC): run for two hours every morning, their aim is to help the children's transition to the first grade through stimulating pre-school activities. In 1991-92, some 900 children between the ages of 3 and 6 were enrolled in 30 CRCs. Because of their popularity, some villages have started a second CRC with local resources. Primary school teachers agree that children from CRCs "come to school neatly dressed. They are self-confident, regular and adjust well to school routine." Parents also see that their children learn to sing songs, tell stories, wash their hands before meals and insist on wearing clean clothes. Every six months, the children from the CRC gather to display their achievements to the villagers, so putting education on centre stage.



*Rallying around education: village leaders participate in the activities of an NFE class*

***Women's Development Groups** are attached to the CRCs and are a forum for discussing child development, population education, income-generating activities, nutrition, health and legal rights. "I told women they would feel much happier if they didn't have to ask someone else to help them," said the organiser of one women's group. "Now they realize the importance of education and come regularly to our meetings." These are held once a week for two to three hours, often in the late evening, drawing the attention of villagers.

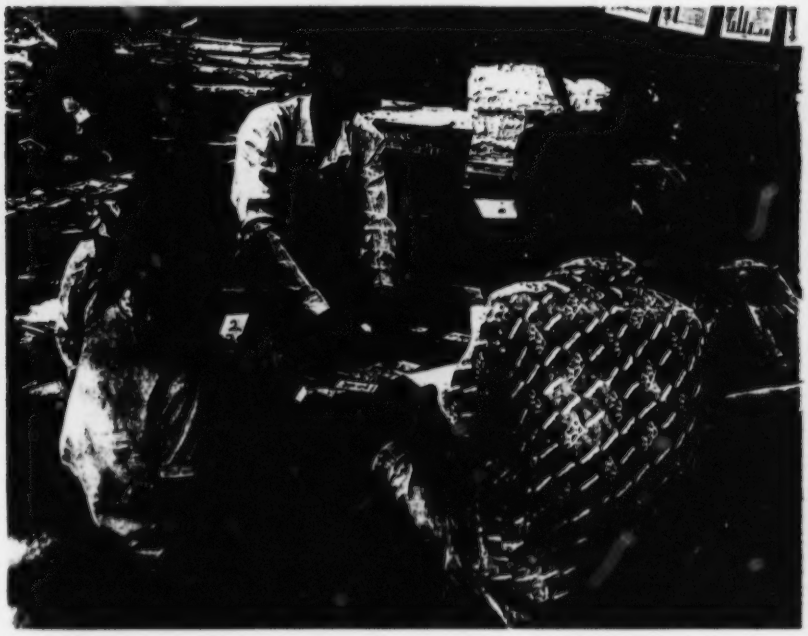
Because of the good relationship between the education of women and girls' school attendance, the PROPEL project had envisioned condensed primary courses for adult women. But there were no takers, mainly because older girls and women saw no benefit in this kind of education at their age. They asked instead for skills-training to increase their income. As a result, the project is seeking suitable occupational training courses for women organised by other voluntary agencies, which emphasizes the need for partnerships at grassroots level for economic and social development.

***Jana Shikshan Nilayams** (People's Education Houses) have been set up to provide reading material for everyone, from children to semi-skilled and fluent readers. Literate parents borrow storybooks to read to their children. These centres, run by a part-time worker, create an educational climate in villages by organising

handwriting competitions, community reading of daily newspapers, performances of plays, sports events, games and fairs, and celebration of festivals. Several days a week are reserved for women and girls. Newspapers, magazines, materials on health, hygiene, agriculture, science and technology were most in demand.

***Women's camps** for boosting education and development of women and girls. The camps stress the importance of sending girls to school and help women change their traditional attitudes about the future of their daughters as wives and mothers. The positive impact of the camps on girls' education is noticeable in the PROPEL area: enrolment and attendance of girls in formal schools and NFE centres has improved; women attending the camps have immunized their children and can prepare the oral rehydration drink. In some communities, women have become members of Village Education Committees and the Panchayats.

***Training of VECs** for micro-planning and grassroots education. In 1991-92, 1,936 people, 581 of them women, took part in one-day orientation sessions on identifying local educational problems, planning educational facilities and activities, and enhancing village resources. Non-formal teaching and learning is explained and demonstrated. The project has produced booklets on local development planning and the role and function of VECs.



**Mobilizing the Panchayats:** while the VECs manage the educational activities of the community, the Panchayats are the top bodies in the villages, making important decisions about the community's entire development. Training Panchayat members to reduce their traditional dependence on government initiatives for development is a key aspect of microplanning. In the PROPEL project, all 85 Panchayats involved in the project have received training.

*Increasing education's visibility and putting it within reach of the whole community is one of PROPEL's highlights.*

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# Influencing the formal system

*"Resistance from formal school teachers and educational bureaucracy was a big problem in the initial stages."*

The project does not see formal and non-formal primary education as parallel or competing systems, but as complementary ones. "What the country now needs is primary education which keeps to a universally accepted standard of learning achievement through a variety of mediators such as schools, centres, groups of voluntary teachers, in flexible time schedules and pedagogical approaches, and in a manner which makes people themselves take up responsibility to manage the system, with such help as they need from government," said Dr Naik in "Collaborating for Educational Change", noting that these measures were being developed in PROPEL by training the Panchayats and the VECs.

From the start, PROPEL has sought collaboration with teachers in the formal primary system to discuss the aims of an alternative educational channel and to invite them to help with household surveys. "Resistance from formal school teachers and educational bureaucracy was a big problem in the initial stages", says Dr Naik. As time passed however, "non-interference with formal schools and allowing teachers to observe the progress of PROPEL innovations removed their resistance." Besides recognizing that PROPEL was backed at the state and district levels, teachers saw the rapid achievements of NFE-centre students in language and arithmetic and the good scholastic level of children seeking to switch from non-formal centres to formal schools. Formal school teachers also reported a marked increase in enrolment of 6 to 8-year-old girls in project areas, which they attribute to PROPEL's support programmes like the CRCs and women's groups.

Their request to use the project's teaching-learning materials led to a programme in 1991 to "non-formalize" grades I and II. During one-day orientation sessions once a month, primary school teachers learnt how to motivate children and create a cheerful atmosphere in the classroom and outside. As well as the materials supplied to NFE centres, they also received special booklets of stories and songs. The project team found that the small groups and systematic but informal style of the training programme led teachers to express their opinions and ideas. Role-playing helped them overcome initial awkwardness about singing songs and telling stories in a lively way.

Three innovative activities were tied to this orientation programme. In 40 schools, welcomes were organised for first graders on the first day of school. Senior students sang songs and offered a flower to each child. Villagers gave each new child sweets and token gifts like pencils and erasers and the new entrant introduced himself/herself. This ceremony emphasizes that the first day of school should be an exciting and special experience, and a memory throughout life for the child.

All students took part in Independence Day (August 15) and Republic Day (January 26) celebrations by giving a cultural performance before the village community which included songs, story-telling, reading out passages, making little speeches and orally solving a few sums. It made teachers and children proud and greatly helped the community to appreciate schooling and participate in transforming the school into a community-based institution. Finally, instead of setting aside days

*Students from a formal school enjoy looking in on an NFE class in their village*

for examinations, teachers conducted regular tests and evaluations as "learning exercises" and reported that children were eager to do them.

PROPEL's attempt to make the rural primary school more responsive to children's needs grew out of the favourable assessment by teachers of the NFE programme, echoing J.P. Naik's vision that success outside the system can eventually change conditions within it. In the PROPEL project, the alternatives of full-time formal education and part-time non-formal education are coming closer together to complement each other as communities have been mobilized and helped to decide their own educational future.



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# Obstacles: poverty and early marriage

***"Parents try to marry off their daughters as soon as possible."***

Irregular attendance is the most common problem of NFE centres. Poverty, negative parental attitudes, early marriage and migration to towns or other villages lead to dropping out, endangering the NFE centre. "In NFE centres, girls outnumber boys. So in some classes, the girls get married and we have to stop the work. If there are 15 students in NFE centres and five to six are married, the remaining students feel that it's not necessary to go there, because their friends have left. They come in groups of two or three and when the group leader goes, the others stay at home," says a PROPEL staff member. Diaries of education coordinators reveal many cases of girls leaving due to early marriage. "Parents try to marry off their daughters as soon as possible, because they are poor," says an education coordinator. "It's also a question of superstition and rituals, because 12 and 13-year old girls marry" even though the official minimum age of marriage for girls is 18. VEC members and education coordinators visit parents of students who attend irregularly and try to change their attitude towards learning. As one education coordinator explains, this has to be done on a regular basis: "If parents do not believe in the first place, they are contacted again and again and told how important it is to educate the children in these NFE classes. They are also invited to the class and shown what goes on in the hope they will understand how important it is to attend regularly."

Whenever possible, the NFE instructor and the education coordinator keep in touch with children who drop out of the programme. They are given self-learning and other reading materials from the NFE centres and guidance from the instructor. Girls who get married and stay in the same village are also encouraged to continue their studies or become involved in other PROPEL programmes, such as the women's development groups.

In isolated tribal hamlets with only three to four school-age children, it is not possible to establish an NFE centre. The project therefore encourages the Panchayats in which these hamlets are included to choose volunteers to coach the children. A training programme is made available to these volunteer instructors, who visit the hamlets by arrangement with the learners.

The project works closely with local authorities, making it vulnerable to factional politics, especially at election time. The project staff tries to reduce contact with communities before and during local elections to minimize the effect of political clashes over the programme. But NFE instructors are more easily caught in the crossfire. Some NFE centres have been closed because teachers were involved in politics. In one, several parents stopped sending their children because the instructor was a candidate of a political party they did not support.

Winning co-operation from government functionaries has been an uphill battle. While they have not obstructed the project, they are sometimes reluctant to share power with the Village Education Committees. "The fear of losing control explains their confused response," explains Dr Naik. Nevertheless, she expects co-operation to increase in the next few years in light of the 1993 Act of Parliament requiring state governments to decentralize administrative and financial powers to the village level.

# Resources: winning state recognition

The project has not run into serious financial problems. At its 1979 launch, which coincided with the International Year of the Child, it received funding from UNICEF and the state of Maharashtra. In the second phase, the Ford Foundation gave a three-year US $110,000 grant because of its interest in improving the socio-economic status of rural women. Government's approval of the IIE model in 1985-86 was proof of a welcome change in official attitudes towards NGOs. In its third stage, the government has supported innovations in primary education for the underprivileged.

Since 1988, the project has received approximately Rs 800,000 (US $28,000) per year from the Ministry of Human Resource Development. The IIE has borne the cost of some materials and honoraria out of its own funds collected through donations. The director of the project has not taken a salary or honorarium since the project began in 1979. Despite recent improvements, the state government's attitude towards voluntary organisations tends to be characterized by indifference, occasional distrust and sometimes fear, says Dr Naik. "Governmental structures and procedures still remain more or less colonial (...) If voluntary agencies receive government grants, they are suspected of misuse of funds and are subjected to unimaginative audits which interfere with programmes. If they are successful, there is fear that government officials would be undervalued and blamed for not performing well." At some stage or another, the PROPEL project has come up against these attitudes.

*Wearing name tags, students at an NFE centre practice their writing skills. Like any other NFE programmes, PROPEL's affordability has made it acceptable to educational planners.*

The cost factor of innovations is also important: like many other NFE programmes, PROPEL is acceptable to educational planners because it costs about a third as much as full-time primary education. The ratio of teacher to non-teacher costs was also 60:40, compared with 95:5 in the full-time system.

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# Achievements and lessons

PROPEL has been likened to a kaleidoscope, reflecting its ever-evolving and all-encompassing approach to development. "This is mainly why the programme has been successful," says an education coordinator. "The communities think of it as their own programme." PROPEL's experience shows that genuine community participation is possible if the project starts out based on local needs and conditions. Some of PROPEL's most important assets are:

•An approach which puts management of education in the hands of communities, reviving a pre-colonial tradition of village schools. This responsibility cannot be assumed overnight: it requires training in planning, running and monitoring educational programmes. "Initially, awakening the communities was the main problem," says Dr Naik. "The main strategy for solving this has been to stimulate community initiatives to plan and implement an interrelated cluster of educational activities, through the Village Education Committee set up by the entire community." From the outset, IIE fieldworkers took time to weave relationships at village level, not only with NFE instructors, but also with primary school teachers, local leaders and the community at large.

"We take into account all their views and attitudes, then we discuss these new patterns," says one staff member. "We give as much time as we can, because people's education takes a lot of time. It takes time to go to communities, and sit there and discuss things." No aspect of the programme has been planned or implemented without collaboration between local authorities, field staff and the IIE's project team.

•The expertise and commitment of the IIE staff, and their "action-research" approach which encourages participation and self-examination, has made the programme a guide for voluntary agencies around the country working in non-formal education. 65 voluntary organisations have begun to use the IIE model of non-formal education in Maharashtra, reaching 75,000 pupils. In the next few years, PROPEL will concentrate upon training representatives of voluntary agencies and district-level government functionaries in micro-education through community mobilization. A request has been made to the Ministry of Human Resource Development to provide some funds for setting up a special cell at the IIE specifically for training.

•A flexible, locally-relevant programme. The child is at the centre of this approach. From locating the NFE centre as close to students' homes as possible to developing a curriculum and lively learning methods based on local environment, PROPEL has reached 4,500 children, 3,000 of them girls. When asked what they like best about the NFE centres, children mention songs, drama, story-telling and games, indicating the importance of learning through play. "Children feel they don't come to the centres just for education, but also for recreation," says an education coordinator. Seeing the achievements of students attending NFE centres, formal schools have begun to adopt some of PROPEL's methods in grades I and II.

•The PROPEL project shows that it is not time exposure but good teaching that guarantees the

*Attending classes at their local NFE centre has changed the outlook of many children and their lives.*

quality of learning. Through group work and the principle of "mastery-learning," NFE pupils reached 70 per cent of the expected levels of competence according to one evaluation. Tests showed that the student performance in NFE centres was better than that of formal school children at the same class-level, although NFE students tend to be older and more mature than their counterparts in the formal system. The project also shows that achievements in the non-formal sector can influence the formal primary school, and eventually lead to better quality and retention.

*Appointing local teachers reinforces the community dimension of the project. The informal teaching atmosphere encourages children to look on their instructors as brothers and sisters. Instructors' regular contacts with education coordinators and recurrent training are also key strategies for maintaining motivation and quality.

*Making the benefits of education visible to all. The community is welcome to visit the NFE centres at any time. Through children's fairs, celebrations on Independence Day and other events, the whole community becomes aware of the programme's influence on children's lives.

*Putting education within reach of all age groups has boosted enrolments, especially of girls. Communities have become more aware of the importance of education, and parents have noticed changes in their children's attitudes. PROPEL's support programmes have started to create the foundations for a learning society.

*Drawing professional groups into the educational challenge: in project areas, agricultural experts, doctors and staff from primary health centres have given talks to VECs and women's groups. One female doctor wrote a women's folk play on the "birth of a girl-child" and offered to organise health-camps for children and women. Officials from cooperative banks have told groups about their schemes for savings, investment and loans.


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# Conclusion

***"Because we ourselves couldn't learn, we want to give a chance to our children".***

Since its founding, the IIE has firmly believed local people hold the keys to development and social change. In Maharashtra, some 283 villages have succeeded in reaching out-of-school children and turning education into a community initiative. This has been a catalyst for a much deeper change in attitudes toward gender bias and poverty. Lifted from the restraints of a classroom's four walls, education tailored to local needs and managed by the people can drive the whole community forward. Support programmes for young children and women have increased demand for primary education.

The programme challenges myths that parents are unwilling to educate their girls: "My daughter will be able to educate her own children because she has learned in the centre. Her life will be different from mine," says one mother. "Because we ourselves couldn't learn, we want to give a chance to our children. Education helps girls take better care of themselves, their hygiene and their own children," said one woman in a village meeting. "It's important that if problems come up, girls know something about their rights."

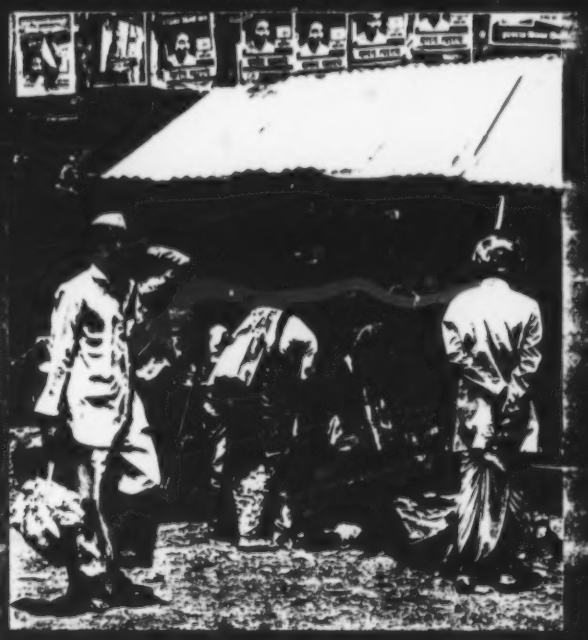
Seeing children speaking confidently in public, paying attention to cleanliness and helping their siblings in the formal school with homework have all created an awareness in the community of education's importance and furthered the demand for schooling. "We must make our children more literate," said one mother. "After all, we can't depend on farming any more. The rains are erratic here so they need an alternative income, a regular job."

If Education for All is to be achieved in developing countries, non-formal programmes have to be considered acceptable channels of education. In the long term, Dr Naik envisages two complementary channels for basic education in India, but warns against "formalizing" the NFE system by staffing it with teachers who are products of the formal system.

The common thread running through PROPEL's action in both channels is an emphasis on making education part of community life. This can only happen through decentralization, collaboration and partnerships, key strategies of India's education policy. PROPEL has first reached children, especially girls, who would otherwise never have had the chance to learn. Secondly, it has shown that more lively, participatory teaching and greater community awareness about the importance of education can stem the tide of dropouts and increase the quality of education, bringing universal elementary education a step closer.

Because such programmes must be tailored to local conditions and problems, they must be the fruit of community action. PROPEL's strength lies in the expertise it has gained in training people at the grassroots to take responsibility for education. In the course of this evolution, the project has broadened children's horizons, allowing them to think and talk about their future with confidence.

# FEATURES



## THE INDIAN INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION:

### Health and Education for All

The Indian Institute of Education(IIE) is a non-governmental research institute established in 1948 in Bombay. Its founder, J.P. Naik, conceived it as a dynamic research centre dedicated to formulating educational policies and programmes suited to independent India, with emphasis on mass education. In 1976, the Institute moved to Pune where better facilities became available for its growing activities. It is affiliated to the University of Poona for M.Phil and Ph.D courses in education. Apart from conceptual research in problems of educational planning and administration, the Institute conducts large scale action- research, particularly in rural areas, with a view to:

1) developing innovations and alternatives for universalizing primary and adult education

2) training rural youth and women in science and technology

3) integrating decentralized educational planning with other developmental areas such as health, social welfare, economic enterprise and political awareness. The goal is to simultaneously upgrade human and material resources through the collaborative efforts of government administration, intellectuals and the local community. "Education for All" and "Health for All" has been the combined mandate of the Institute in matters of policy and planning. It believes that education, both formal and especially non-formal, is the best instrument for enabling people to achieve tangible and sustainable well being. Along with research, teaching and training, the Institute has built up a sizeable network of education and development organisations and individuals. It strives to bring together intellectuals, activists and the people for mutually beneficial interaction. The IIE publishes a quarterly journal, "Education and Social Change," and a journal in Marathi targeting parents, voluntary workers and government officials. Special publications are also produced for semi-skilled rural readers.The Institute receives its maintenance grant from the Indian Council of Social Science Research, New Delhi and the government of Maharashtra. More recently, its donors have included UNICEF, UNESCO, the Ford Foundation, IDRC (Canada), and several German NGOs.

## The Indian scene:

### *Facts and figures*

| | |
|---|---|
| **Population:** | **862.7 million** |
| **Annual growth rate:** | **2%** |
| **Land area:** | **3,287,590 km²** |
| **Duration of compulsory education:** | **8 years** |
| **Adult illiteracy rate:** | **51.8%** |
| **Male/female literacy gap:** | **0.55** |
| **Primary school enrolment:** | **66.3%** |
| **Female primary teachers:** | **28%** |
| **Children reaching grade 4 (as % of primary enrolment):** | **61.0** |
| **Primary school completion (as % of primary enrolment):** | **53.0%** |

*Sources: UNESCO, Government of India: IIE*



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Making it work

FEATURES

# THE PROPEL PROJECT: Reaching out to all

**NFE Centres**

Through non-formal education centres, PROPEL reaches out-of-school children, especially girls, from 137 villages in Pune district

**Formal Education:**

300 teachers from 128 primary schools have participated in PROPEL's orientation

**non-formal education supportive programmes**

| | |
|---|---|
| CRC: Child Recreation Centre | Multifaceted child development<br>Child's preparation for school<br>30 children x 30 centres = 900 |
| Literacy Programme: Volunteer based | Imparting literacy. Awareness of personal and societal situation. Health education.<br>2,118 learners and 1,863 volunteers |
| JSN: Jan Shiksham Nilayam | Social and educational of community centres.<br>100 members per JSN = 2,000 members |
| VEC: Village Education Committee | Participation in their own education<br>Exercise in micro planning<br>85 VECs x 10 members = 850 |
| WDC: Women Development Centre | Home support to child<br>Empowerment of women<br>60 girls/women x 30 centres = 1,800 |

Source: IIE



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*Education for All. Making it Work is a major international UNESCO programme to collect, analyze and promote successful basic education projects in the developing world.*

***Previous issues in the series:***

**No.1**
**All Children can learn.**
*Chile's 900 schools Programme for the underprivileged. 1993* (English, Spanish, French, Arabic)

**No.2**
**In our own hands.**
*The story of Saptagram, a women's self-reliance movement in Bangladesh. 1994* (English, French, Arabic)

Making it work

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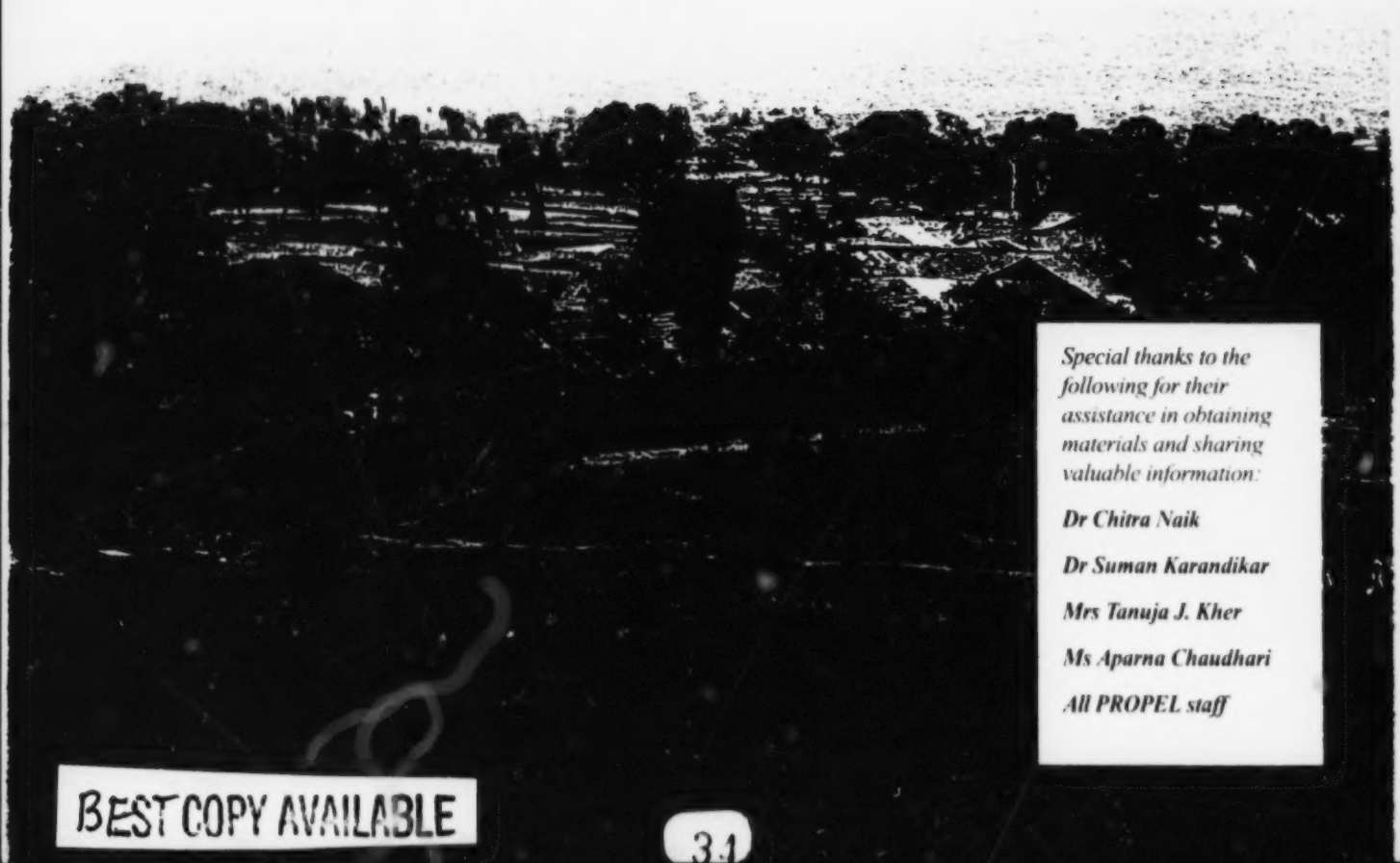

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***All PROPEL staff***

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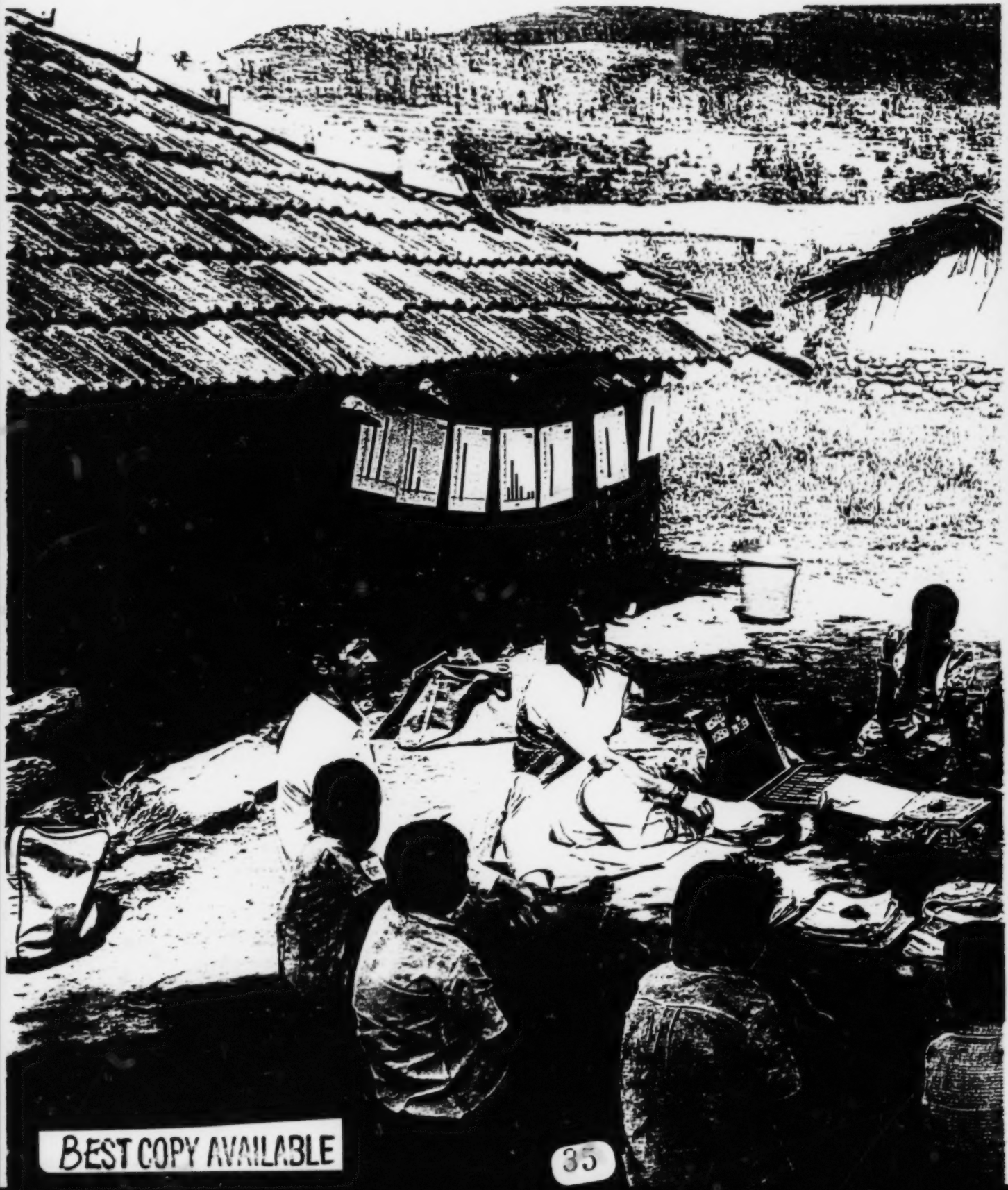

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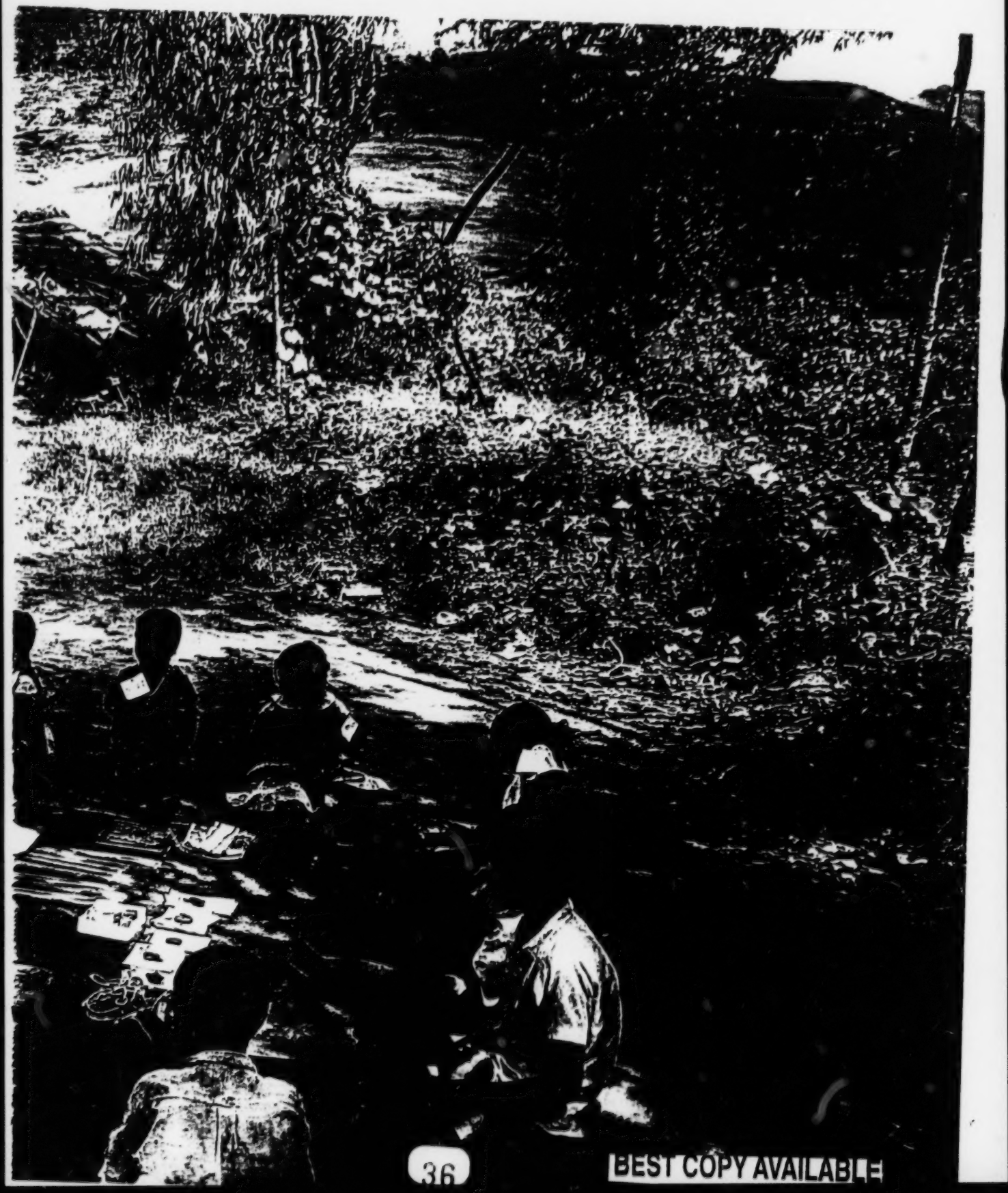



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**"My daughter** will be able to educate her own children because she has learned in the centre. Her life will be different from mine," says the mother of Kamala, nine. Like 3,000 other out-of-school girls in Maharashtra, India, Kamala goes to Apla Vargh, "our class", a non-formal education programme designed by the Indian Institute of Education. Called PROPEL (promoting primary and elementary education) and now active in 137 villages, it has succeeded in reaching girls, often excluded from primary education by deeply rooted social customs. Local teachers, flexible hours, community involvement and modern pedagogical methods are among the keys to its success.

Selected by UNESCO's programme *Education for All, Making it Work*, PROPEL is a showcase project to promote education for rural girls in developing countries.

This project shows us that education for rural girls is possible, when integrated into community life. Greater community awareness about the importance of education is a powerful tool to stem the tide of dropouts and increase the quality of education. Parents will send their girls to school, when class hours are flexible and education is perceived as a way to a better life. Support programmes like creches, women's groups, adult literacy, and training villagers to manage local education make PROPEL a comprehensive community-based and decentralized model of primary education that works.

The editors

Making it work

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